'CENSION

BY

MAUDE MASON AUSTIN

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"STANDING THERE IN THE SUN-BLEACHED GRASS"

'CENSION

A Sketch from Paso Del Norte

BY

MAUDE MASON AUSTIN

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TO

MY BELOVED FATHER

RANIER HALL MASON

2061822

ILLUSTRATIONS

"STANDING THERE IN THE SUN-BLEACHED GRASS" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

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"'Tis the pure intelligence of mind,
That, like some unborn light, beams from her soul;
The virtuous thoughts that clothe her like a garment;
The chastity, the candor, and the meekness,
That, through her parted hair, look from a brow
And features where the seal of heaven is set."

'CENSION

"So every spirit, as it is more pure,
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it the fairer body doth procure
To habit in, and it more fairly dight
With cheerful grace and amiable sight.
For soul is form, and doth the body make."

—*Spenser.*

I

Waning summer, as if weary with propagation, languished over the Rio Grande valley. All day the little feathered habitants of the province, bathing themselves in the sun, had trilled rondos with many *da capos*, but no *fine*. All mundane things panted under the sun's

receding glare. Unabashed by consciousness of a leafy provision elsewhere, it poured upon the bare austerity of landscape and frolicked afar over the verdureless miles. The flocks of goats that flecked the open stretches looked like painted card-board animals in a child's nursery menagerie. Some patient burros, lately relieved of their burdens of mesquit roots, were making lazily, like a squad of ducks, for a near *jacal*.

The silence was unbroken, save for the "caw, caw" of a tardy-sailing crow overhead, or the half-sad whistle of a *cordoniz*, with an occasional swish, swish, as the yellow waters of the Rio Grande lapped encroachingly the reeds on its banks. To the girl standing there ankle-deep in the sun-bleached grass, the infinite distances of sunset sky seemed to hold a peculiar significance. Every line of her graceful figure, her unstudied at-

titude, was enhanced by her simple dress. It was only a short petticoat of nondescript red, and a loose blouse of sleazy white cotton that had seen many washings; but it clung softly, falling away from a throat faultless in contour, if not in coloring. A half-sleeve left bare a sloping wrist, brown like the small hands and tapering fingers that would have graced a duchess. Her *rebosa* had slipped from her head in her intentness, and a wealth of blackest hair clung around her face and neck, in those soft curves that are so charming but so rare in the usual straight locks of her countrywomen.

A sound as of breaking twigs on her right seemed to recall 'Cension to earthly thoughts. Her almost glorified look gave place to a half-troubled expression, as if life's unpleasant earthliness had returned to her. A small figure stood ner-

vously hesitating before showing itself beyond the mesquit bushes in front. This figure, in a long-skirted dress that did not quite hide two exceedingly brown feet, held a black mantilla in quaint nunnish fashion over her tightly braided locks, disclosing an unchildlike face with two restless black eyes.

Little Anita seemed at first irresolute; then, throwing the end of the shawl with quick determination over her left shoulder, in that peculiarly Mexican fashion acquired by them in their very infancy, one verily believes, she came out into the waste, half-meadow, half-prairie, where her sister stood. She slipped a little hand into 'Cension's shapely one hanging listlessly down, and did not speak for a moment; then taking the hand in both her small ones, she said, softly, like one understanding the art of sweet sympathy,

"'Cension, dearie! Eduardo is there. They want you."

They stood thus quite still for a moment; then laying her palm on the little girl's shoulder, 'Cension said, in a musical, almost a pathetic, voice, "Anita *mia*, I will come."

They passed through numerous uneven, circumscribed fields. Don Ricardo, their father, with much painstaking, had partitioned these into little ridged squares for irrigating summer crops, long since transferred to the granaries. A few yards farther they came out into the public *camino* which leads to Paso del Norte. As they walked along between the cottonwoods, where the fast-falling night seemed suddenly closing in, Anita looked down at the delightfully soft, fine dust which fairly gave a delicious thrill to each naked toe, and said,

"You do not mind? You are not angry with me, 'Cension? I did not want to come; they sent me. I knew you would rather be *there*," giving a backward jerk of her small head; then, more hesitatingly, "You do not want to see Eduardo?"

"Anita, child, what can you mean? Of course I want to see Eduardo," and a quick flash passed over the face which the little sister did not see. The tone awed the child, and she walked demurely along without again looking at the face above her. Her poor little heart sank despondingly as she felt that perhaps 'Cension might think that she was not herself overpleased to see Eduardo. This was indeed only too true, the shrinking, sensitive child experiencing nothing but nervous shyness when the swaggering figure and bold eyes of that gentleman put in an appearance at the *rancho*.

At a turn of the road they came into a narrower one, almost a lane, bordered by a hedge, and so to Don Ricardo Dorantes' ancestral hall. Out-buildings, corrals, goat sheds, vineyards, and complicated extension of sun-dried brick-walls, presented no mean inventory of creature-comfort. The front of the building had once been whitewashed, but though it now presented an exceedingly piebald front from numerous sloughings off of the aforementioned limy application, it still filled Ricardo's plebeian heart with pride. He had never felt it incumbent to either remove or renew the poor isolated patches of dirty white clinging here and there to the strawy bricks of the façade. The windows were few; the rooms large and gloomy. The floors, from conscientious sprinklings, were kept in a state of beautiful hardness, and Doña Liseta would have

scorned boards or a carpet covering except for the *sala*. The wide door, made of boards bolted together, opened into a hall where you never knew whether the foolish world outside were hot or cold, and this again into a *patio*. Here upon an elevation in the centre grew the señora's foxgloves, chrysanthemums, verbenas, and cacti. Around the border of the walks in this court grew fragrant Castilian roses, and a luxuriant confusion of oleanders, honeysuckle, and young fig-trees, and here Anita's linnets and red-birds chirped loudly in their reed houses through the long bright days. Through an opening in the rear could be seen down-hanging boughs of weighted peach-trees touching the earth with their burden of sun-kissed fruitage, broad-leaved fig-trees and acres of bunchily pruned vineyard; for Ricardo Dorantes' possessions were extensive. Be-

yond was a shed thatched with mud, tule, and tasselled lengths of corn-stalks, an impervious agrarian roof where the linnets chirped and nested in scores; and all around was the odor of half-dried fruit spread in batches in the sun.

As 'Cension and Anita came slowly towards the house the figures before it were clearly outlined: Don Ricardo, rough, uncouth, unredeemably ugly, but kind-hearted. Rather given to thoughts of earthly pelf, he did not trouble himself about repeating paternosters. One did not believe that Ricardo would even scruple to drive a bunch of burros to Paso del Norte on the Sabbath, if he were sure of a ready and profitable sale of their loads.

Amiable and indolent of disposition, Ricardo liked nothing better than an unlimited number of siestas through

the summer, and a comfortable squat in a warm *serape* on the sunny side of the wall in winter. He was proud and fond, in his own blunt way, of his children, and enjoyed seeing the two youngest, boys of eight and ten, tumbling about like little savages in the bright sun. He declared that a family like his—"peons," as he sometimes dubbed them, to vex his eldest, a young man of rare good looks and rarer qualities—could grow up like the weeds on his *acequias*. The two youngest perhaps could so thrive, as their wide eyes, stiff hair, and expressionless faces, so like Ricardo's own, indicated no present or future yearnings. Not so Pablo, the son, and 'Cension, the girl with the sad, deep eyes. They inherited a fine nature from the gentle mother, whose undoubted Castilian lineage, though many generations removed, appeared again in those favored two.

Their brownness of skin, though as dark as old Placido's brood in the nearest *jacal*, was as fine and smooth as satin, and a certain grace of manner and bearing was noticeable in them that was not of Ricardo's ancestry.

The sweet-faced mother sat near the door keeping up a spasmodic conversation with Santas. Her own well-preserved face bore no resemblance to the grandmother's countenance, wrinkled like parchment, out of which looked a pair of keen black eyes, the whole made more uncouth by straight locks that had determined to cling to their mummy-like surroundings in primitive blackness. A man with his back to the others was talking voluble Spanish to Pablo, who listened with a bored, almost uncivil, air.

The talker turned at Ricardo's exclamation of "There she is!" and, ad-

vancing to meet the figure coming gracefully towards them, you saw his face. Not much above medium height, his well-knit figure impressed you with its consciousness of agility and muscle, but his slightly swaggering gait was not atoned for by a supercilious air which was responsible for poor timid Anita's half-fear, half-antipathy. Deep, cold eyes softened by long lashes did not quite redeem the other rather prominent features of his face. His mouth was wide, his chin and lower face heavy and sensuous, partly concealed by a stiff mustache, and when he lifted his silver-braided sombrero you saw that his hair was coarse. Still, all in all, he was far from looking an ill-favored mortal; on the contrary, he was just the half-ugly specimen that will forever hold sway with women.

Well equipped in tan-colored trousers,

striped on the outer seams and adorned with fringe, short round jacket with full shirt underneath, he made a presentable picture as he cantered out from Paso del Norte on his clay-colored *caballo* with much ornamented saddle-trappings. He thought with much complacency as he rode along through "lover's lane," then out into the country road, of how this *ensemble* would be appreciated by 'Censión, and was not a little vexed when she was not there to see it.

"You did not care to see me, it seems," he said, in an undertone, watching the bright light that gathered in her deep eyes and fell tremblingly over the sweet face and full lips.

"I did not know you would come. How can you say so, Eduardo?"

They walked slowly towards the others, at last disappearing through the half-open door, where, beyond the arched

portales around the patio, they could enjoy the seclusion so affected by lovers of all climes.

Pablo stood where their visitor had left him, an uneasy look on his face, which the ever-watchful little mother was not slow to notice.

"Come, Pablo *mio*, for a little walk," she said, softly, laying her hand on his arm.

"What is it, mother? You want to speak to me?" he half questioned as they walked on by the alfalfa field, and a star here and there seemed suddenly thrust through the overhanging blue dome.

"Yes, Pablo. You are not happy, my son. Can you not let your mother know the cause?"

"Not happy, mother!" he said, in a tone of deep sadness. "Can one ever be happy again, think you, with such a sorrow as mine on his heart?" and they

walked on in silence a few steps. "But it was not my unhappiness that you saw, if there was any on my face just now. I was thinking of 'Cension," and he struck sharply among the dense growth of tall sunflowers that grew along the field's edge and covered every available space on the farm.

"You do not like Eduardo? you do not approve of it?" she asked, with growing anxiety in her voice.

"Like him? I hate him! He is a villain!" he burst out, excitedly; then, more quietly, "Forgive me, mother, I startled you. But to answer your question as it deserves: no, I do not approve. He is a stranger, and I do not trust him. I have said nothing of my feelings before," he went on. "I felt it might be prejudice on my part; and 'Cension loves him. But I know now —from rumors—that there are reasons

for doubting his character. Poor little sister," he said, softly, as if to himself, "I fear these happy days are short."

Doña Liseta stopped suddenly, and looked up into her son's face in a startled way. "Pablo, you frighten me," she said, in a slightly trembling voice. "They have the padre's blessing, given them on last St. Miguel's day, and, Holy Mother! you say he is a villain."

"Never mind, mother sweet; it will all come right, depend upon it. I will look well to our dear little girl's interest." And as she was about to enter some protest, he went on in the half-persuasive, half-authoritative tone which always silenced all doubts in Doña Liseta's breast. "Can't you trust me, mother? I give my life"—an oft-expressed exaggeration among the Mexicans of a pledge of faithfulness; to Pablo, alas, in this instance something of a precursor—

"I give my life that 'Cension's future shall be all we wish it. Promise me now that no more thought of this matter shall find a place in your heart, mother mine," he said, placing his two hands on her shoulders and turning her around in the road preparatory to the return to the house.

"My son, you are in all things right and perfect; I will not trouble my heart more. Surely the Blessed Mother will not let harm come to her," she ejaculated, lifting her eyes and crossing herself. "Yes, Pablo, I trust you entirely," and neither spoke further as they slowly retraced their steps.

Pablo's glance turned in the direction of the river, where could be seen several half-finished lines of adobe wall, the window apertures standing boldly outlined in the light of the half-night fallen over the fields. A deep sadness crept over

his face, and, grown oblivious of his companion and the late conversation, he did not even notice the glances of pity his mother gave to him, too absorbed in the sad memories with which this half-finished ruin filled his heart. Those same half-built walls were to have been his home! A few months before he had watched the death dews gather on the face of the woman who was to have shared it with him. Holding still her chilled hand in his in that awful moment, he found no comfort in the whispered words that the other, "the little life," was spared to him. His heart had closed suddenly at the seeming mockery of a recompense so cruel. He could have laughed aloud in his agony that they should try to comfort him thus, try to hint that he was not altogether bereft, that he had this wee thing in exchange for her, his wife, his Ysidora!

In the dark days that followed he did not even remember the small creature they had called Ysidora at the young mother's request. The feeble little life lingered on a few weeks, then flickered out, leaving him to wonder why the seemingly useless, sorrow-burdened journey should ever have been made at all. In this mystery of life-giving death it comforted him to think that perhaps the young mother, seeing the little one left behind, had begged of Heaven that it might come back to her there.

Always devoted to his mother and 'Cension, Pablo's recent scathing experience of sorrow had made him more gentle, more considerately loving and loyal than ever before, if that were possible, and the gentle mother knew well that she could trust his sister's future to his watchful care.

When Eduardo Lerma bowed his

buenas noches to the party in front as he stood, whip in hand, ready to spring into the saddle, Doña Liseta tried not to give a different inflection to her ordinary tone of *adios.* But there came a deep wrinkle of perplexity into her usually placid forehead, and an unconscious sigh escaped her as she noted 'Cension's lingering gaze down the shadowy lane that hid the departing figure of man and horse, while the hoof notes still sounded softly in the dusty road.

Had not Pablo doubted him — predicted trouble? and could Pablo ever be mistaken?

Later, when all was quiet, 'Cension, in a two-piece night-dress, her beautiful hair falling over her shoulders, came into a room to the right of the hall, and, lighting the many candles about an altar,

dropped softly upon her knees, and commenced telling the rosary she carried.

Oh, for such faith in our Saviour as this innocent girl lavished upon the presence of this imaged Holy Mother, if not upon the actual wooden semblance itself! Restless of heart, to this she had come for comfort. The draped Madonna before which she knelt was a miserably wrought effigy. To the child of nature kneeling there it was the embodiment of grace and sweetness. Her faith was that of a true believer, not the mere consent of the mind to an abstract proposition; and it was the ruling principle of her life. Reared in the well-settled valley of the Rio Grande, within a few miles of Paso del Norte and the rushing young city of El Paso, which the Americans had built as in a night on the river's other bank, this girl had grown up in a seclusion and innocence

almost incredible. Nothing of dissipation more than an occasional visit to Paso del Norte, and less frequent ones to Ysleta, in the other direction, broke the monotony of her days—that indeed knew no monotony, for it is rare that untried wings long for the soarings of the practised flyer.

Doña Liseta had insisted that her children should have educational advantages. Ricardo, with no ideas in his thick head save those of peace, felt that "accomplished" children would add to the respect with which his neighbors already regarded him; it had had an enlarging effect upon his soul and a correspondingly loosening effect upon his pocketbook. So a little more than two years before he had harnessed the stout, respectable broncos to the wagonette, while the mother and old Santas made divers preparations within for the

comfort of the dear one starting on so important a journey — surreptitiously stowing away much *viznaga* as a panacea for homesickness. 'Cension had journeyed down the valley to San Elizario, where she stayed for two years, with much contentment and great profit, with the Sisters of Loretto. They had not taught her overmuch learning out of books, but enough to refine the capable mind and stimulate the prodigal imagination. For serious study she had no vocation. Pablo, three years previous to this, had studied for several terms with the Christian Brothers at Las Vegas. He spoke excellent English, and had been employed on the "Mexican Central" between Paso del Norte and the City of Mexico. In one of these engagements in Chihuahua he met and married Ysidora Esperion. He brought his wife to his father's, intending to build

his own house on the farm, determined to settle into farming and take the management of the place into his own hands, as the influx of Americans brought a wide demand for all farm products.

Old Ricardo declared that the relation between the devil and the *Americanos* was of the closest, but did not scorn the American's dollar. He himself became somewhat imbued with the current belief which swayed Pablo and his poorer neighbors, that good times were coming with the advent of the white men and their wonderful railroads. The faith was infectious; easy-going Ricardo Dorantes actually so far forgot himself in those days as positively to sit and speculate upon the increased value of his possessions with almost as much gusto as the grasping Americans on the other side of the river were speculating in corner lots.

But Ricardo was finding, to his disenchantment, as several years passed, that the supposed easily despoiled American insisted upon having value received for all his loose cash. Though they had come and settled in a body and built a brick city, which to indolent Ricardo's mind could only have been built by magic or his Satanic Majesty's help, he was no better off in this world's goods than before the whistle of the locomotive echoed through the valley. Of the white man's energy and enterprise he knew naught. He felt a sense of deep injury from the increased activity which Pablo thought necessary to inaugurate in order to produce and sell according to the new demand. He had never meant to work for the advantages that ought to fall upon him unsolicited with the advent of the Americans, and his dreams were becoming fainter and faint-

er of the day when he, Don Ricardo, would enjoy his horde of the ungodly American dollar.

With the inconsistency of all Mexicans, Ricardo would never accept the eagle-and-cactus-stamped dollar of his own country from an American. One could not say whether it was his great respect for the fierce-looking American "aigle bird," which is able to hold distended wings despite the libel over his head, or deep contempt for the ironical "libertad" on his own country's coin. Neither could one say to what trades union Don Ricardo belonged, but certain it is that the term "scab" or "rat" could never be applied to him in his dealings with the foreigners. He would never have passed for one of those genial souls that might "take some cordiality in part payment where others take cash." Possessing a large estate, a large

laguna and well-kept *acequias*, Ricardo was still ambitious. He had heard that wonderful sums had been received for the right of way for the new railroad through lots in Paso del Norte. He felt deeply injured that that inconsiderate surveyors' party had given his fields so wide a berth when they came with their incomprehensible chains and bad Spanish through the valley. Nothing more tangible was ever seen by Ricardo of his expectations from that railroad business than the long trailing line of smoke in the distance, to be seen from his rear door as the Mexican Central engines rushed along the foothills to the south.

By dint of good management, with the help of old Placido, Pablo found a ready sale across the river for their alfalfa and fruit, as well as for the reed baskets which Casamira (Placido's wife)

and the other women braided. Grandmother Santas, and even 'Cension, often gave a helping hand to these in the long afternoons in the shaded *patio*.

But since his late sad experience Pablo had lost all interest in money-making schemes. But for his growing anxiety about Eduardo Lerma's intentions, he would have solicited railroad employment again, that he might find in more active scenes some solace for his restless heart. Noble fellow that he was, his own desires became secondary considerations when there was a question of anxiety or danger for his mother or 'Cension.

So the days passed, and the autumn came. There was a note of sadness through the valley, as if the very calling *cordoniz* and swaying weeds felt the coming death. There was a pa-

thetic sorrow in the lingering drift of the falling leaf as it sank noiselessly among its fellows in the carpeted softness beneath. The last grapes had been gathered and the wine pressed. Placido had tramped across the bridge the day before with the last basket of sad-skinned pears. And still Pablo had seen Lerma come day after day and had said no word! He had never reopened the subject to his mother after that night by the field; and she, never doubting, had as nearly as possible kept her promise to give it no place in her heart.

Don Ricardo enjoyed unnumbered siestas in the drowsy autumn air, and his good-natured pock-marked visage showed no anxiety for things spiritual, civil, ecclesiastical, terrestrial, or matrimonial. He knew as little of sentiment and soul as of the domestic habits of

the Tonga Islanders. There was one, and only one, subject that could ever provoke Ricardo to a reply or a perpendicular position of body, and that was the wine-making. He would sit stoically through old Santas's sorrowful, disjointed details of the daughter-in-law's death, the new pattern of 'Censión's last drawn linen, the excellence of the last goat cheese, and the inevitable reiteration that Ysidora's baby would now be living if only they could have prepared that dose of melted lard and indigo with more despatch. But when Ynocente would rush in with the startling information that the new cow-skin *tina* was leaking, or that more baskets of grapes had come from the vineyard, his alacrity to vanish left the dear old woman staring with disgust at his favorite seat, worn smooth as furbished iron. "Always the wine! Ricardo will never

care for anything else," she would mutter—and Ricardo didn't.

Of all the beverages since man abandoned the exclusive use of pure cold water, the native wine of Ricardo's valley was the only one of which he had any conception. Of wine that never "grew in the belly of the grape," of champagne made of rhubarb, apples, turnips, and other trash, port made of logwood and brandy, and, as chemists aver, even of the refuse of gas-works, Ricardo knew naught. To his mind a man must either drink wine like that perfected from the juice that rose around the ankles of Placido's naked feet as he crushed the bursting grape cups, or—not exactly confine his libations to the pump, but in Ricardo's vernacular—"*tornar su bebida de la acequia.*"

And 'Cension? With an ever-ripen-

ing beauty that was almost startling she lived the days in virgin speculations and heart-stirrings. The simple, pastoral life fostered idealistic purity; with the very sticks and stones of her daily rambles came suggestive day-dreams.

It was now September, and Pablo had promised her that she should go with him to the festivities in Paso del Norte on the fifteenth and sixteenth. Then the seventy-eighth anniversary of Mexican independence would be celebrated, the statue of Juarez unveiled, and the name of the old town officially changed from Paso del Norte to Juarez, in honor of that patriot. It was to be a "great day." The air was full of discussion and preparation. 'Cension could think of nothing else. She always attended the fiesta de Guadalupe, but this was to be "so much grander." A. Fuentes, and Señor Rafael Calderon de la Barca,

the greatest *banderillero* in Mexico, were to be there; and Señor Daguerre had enlarged the bull-ring. A new $10,000 monte game was to be played, besides roulette, faro, and chuck-a-luck, as well as twelve tables of the national "chuzes." Señor Lauro Carillo, governor of Chihuahua, had suggested the new name for the town, as a fitting tribute to one of Mexico's heroes, and his constituents, in their desire to honor the memory of Benito Juarez, did not deem it a small undertaking to thus change a name of three hundred years' standing.

The Americans, too, were interested and curious, and poured across the bridge—to the horse-car stockholders' delight—to see the bull-fights and take a hand at the games of chance lining the plaza. This anticipated treat filled 'Cension's eyes and heart with a great gladness and actually made her guilty

of curtailing the many Hail Marys and the few Our Fathers with which she finished her nightly devotions, in order that she might the sooner give herself up to thoughts of the coming event.

II

One morning, before the birds had finished their matin burst of song, 'Cension stood under the hedge in the lane, watching, through a break in its yellow line, old Placido bringing the brown and gray broncos from their interrupted croppings in the stubble. The hedge had grown brilliant, though so early for the turning—an exquisite golden stretch — and she shook the amber leaves down upon her head full of all manner of sweet fancies. She still stood deeply engrossed, with many sunny-hued patches clinging about her, when Anita came calling her to the early breakfast. The *tortillas* and *chile con carne* were scarcely touched in her absent-minded

hurry to be off. Don Ricardo, while disposing of red-hot concoctions, grumbled at her want of appetite.

As 'Cension, all ready, with the conventional black shawl over her head, was about to climb into the wagon, there was a gentle tug at her skirts. Anita, with downcast countenance, held out her small hand, saying,

"Here, 'Cension, take my *tlacos* and bring me something."

"Why, Anita, are you not going yourself?" she exclaimed, in much surprise.

"No," the child answered, shortly, because more words would bring an accompaniment of tears.

"But *mamá* said you were to go. Why are you not going?"

"*Quien sabe*," she answered, with a tearful upward look and the national shrug of the shoulders.

"You must go, Anita! I will see what it means," said 'Cension, turning towards the corral, and ignoring the extended coins. A few *tlacos* was wealth to Anita. Now that she had two American pieces-dimes, she had dreamed of worthy purchases. And now she was not to go! But 'Cension had said she must, and 'Cension was good; she would not despair. So she stood, a picture of hope and fear, as she watched her sister's graceful figure disappear.

A woman knelt in the shade from the wall, rubbing the kernels of boiled corn between the stones of the *metate.* She answered 'Cension's question of her mother's whereabouts without looking up, and in a jerky fashion, chopping the words in time to the vigorous rubs of the long white-flecked stone she held in her hands — "The señora is in her room."

'Cension passed on to the sleeping-rooms. She found her mother inspecting, for immediate use, Ricardo's *serape* of bright-colored stripes. With the first suggestion of chill in the air it must be ready for his donning. And had she not that very day imagined there was a growing fresh crispness in the morning? So when her lord departed for the goat-sheds she hurried to the wooden chest, and drawing out the gaudy, fringed blanket, was earnestly overlooking its stripes for broken threads when her daughter gently touched her shoulder.

"Why, child, how you startled me! I thought you were gone, past the *alamos* by now."

"No, mother, I am not gone, as you see. Anita must go too! I do not care to go without her," she said, with tears in her voice, as she remembered

a certain little sorrowful face in the road.

"Tut, child, go! Anita will only be in the way, and besides there will be such a crowd."

"But I will keep her hand," she answered, "and Pablo will meet us there with the boys."

"It is no use, 'Cension," the mother returned, with some firmness. "Go along. Leave the child at home. It is best for her. Some other time she can go; it does not matter."

"But it does matter," persisted 'Cension. "You had told her she could go; she will be so *triste* all day. *Mamacita*," she went on, laying her arm over Doña Liseta's shoulder, caressingly, "you will let her go? You will not make her unhappy?" And the señora yielded, as any other would yield under the spell of a like persuasion.

They started down the lane, Anita smiling happily in her sister's face, Placido with an aniline-colored scarf knotted around his unironed shirt, and his *esposa* with her cotton parasol held aloft where one point could unerringly enter her husband's left ear. The whole party appeared *muy contenta.* Casamira usually appeared on the road seated in front of Placido on old Prieto, while he held a rein from behind on either side of her buxom waist; and she was elated at this drive in state. Doña Liseta stood smiling in the door, thinking proudly how pretty 'Cension was, and what a loving, unselfish heart she had. But as she waved the last *adios* to the smiling pair in the rear of the wagon, she sighed softly, and returned to the blanket, that had actually disclosed a most diminutive rent, with a heart heavy with a foreboding of—she

knew not what. It was very well for Pablo to tell her to put it out of her mind. But things went on just the same as before. If Pablo knew something, as he said, then why did he permit Lerma to continue his constant visits and undisguised admiration of their 'Cension ?

She was so in the habit of ignoring Ricardo in matters of judgment that a consultation with him did not promise comfort. There was possibly no well in this vicinity possessing the charms of St. Keyne's in Cornwall. But Doña Liseta just as effectually held the reins, in her unassuming meekness, as though she had tasted those magic waters. She must mention the matter again to Pablo. Thus determining, she attacked the rent, and stitched in with her leaf-green thread many conjectures and apprehensions.

The *fiesta* party passed into the public road. The mustangs, seeming to realize the situation, trotted at a brisk, respectable gait without much persuasion from Placido's whip. A silence soon fell upon the quartette. 'Cension was full of her own thoughts, Anita calculating how much the coins tightly rolled in her handkerchief would buy; and the old couple in front were silent from mere stupidity. All the passing objects were fraught with their own suggestive thoughts to 'Cension. Conversation with any one of the trio was not inviting. Anita pulled her sister's shawl roughly, saying, "'Cension, why won't you talk? How many oranges can I buy with a cent?"

"None," answered 'Cension, discouragingly, and subsided into her thoughts. Would she see Eduardo?—a dimpling smile hovering around her lips at the

prospect. If she had only known when she saw him three days ago, and told him that she was coming! He would have been so pleased, and watched for her, instead of saying that he would probably not be there at all, as she was not to go. Would he like her new print of lavender and pink? Perhaps she might not see him at all; perhaps he might not be glad that she had come —no, surely not that. Why did Eduardo never care whether she went anywhere or not? Why did he never seem to expect to see her in Paso del Norte? She would not doubt him — oh, no!— but how could she help feeling unhappy when he told her of his gay doings there, of balls, and suppers, and the theatre, just as if it were another world from hers and she outside its pale? And "I am, I am," she cried, inwardly, with quivering lips.

Might she not even to-day see Jesusita Barassa, whom he so often mentioned in his conversation? She wondered what she was like, and if she wore hats like the Americans. Eduardo always spoke of her as a very superior being indeed, with an air which sent poor 'Cension's modest, unassuming heart into the depths. She was often almost unhappy over Eduardo's contradictory moods, and, in truth, cruel bullying of her, though, poor child, she did not know why. He was the sort of man, even in his love affairs, to lean to a dash of the cruel to heighten the zest. He liked a stone in his snowball even when in jest; and after one of his visits she oftener felt like indulging in tears than happy retrospection.

Anita's voice interrupted her reverie again, this time to some purpose. The child would not be silenced now. She

chatted and questioned until 'Cension perforce must take a part, too, and the almost gloomy musings were lost in other interests as the leather-covered wagon, creaking through the sandy road, passed at shorter intervals the adobe homes along the way. They seemed already in town, for Paso del Norte strings out her domains into confusing intersecting streets and lanes and walls, afar in every direction, till the oldest inhabitant could never tell you where its limits proper begin or end.

Placido was telling them of his experience of the day before with the customs inspector at the Texas end of the bridge, and they all laughed and sympathized just at the right point for the narrator's greatest delectation, when 'Cension interrupted him with—

"Placido, what are baseballs? Señor Lerma gave me a copy of *El Ciudadano*

on Sunday, and it says that the Americans across the river are going to have 'baseballs.' What are they, Placido?"

"Baseballs? Why, baseballs are on red wagons, señorita. I have seen them often."

"But, Placido, what are the 'Browns'? It said they would have 'browns' too?"

"Oh, the 'browns'! That's the one with the hose rolled round it."

"Why, Placido, I do believe you mean those things for putting out fires! Pablo once told me all about them."

"Do I? Well, then, baseballs must be them wheels they ride," for Placido had no intention of yielding the field. "Those fool 'Mericanos," he chuckled, "they do have queer things."

There was much of interest to the couple in the back seat now, for they were quite in the suburbs, and there was much to see—many crowded vehi-

cles bent, like their own, for the *fiesta*, all the señoritas in holiday attire. One could not give a more convincing proof of 'Cension's ingenuousness than in the fact of her being utterly unconscious of her own great loveliness, and of her never once comparing her own simple figured print with the often gaudy habiliments displayed on the road. In truth, the comparison need have brought no discomfort to her, for the bright greens, blues, rose colors and purples—why will Mexican women so outrage their thick complexions!—were a blot upon the bright morning.

A robustious señora, in a brilliant purple gown, with a grass-green aniline-bordered shawl over her head, was so utterly unconscious of the disparity as to make it positively delightful. 'Cension avoided these glaring combinations, that would slay a color critic, not so

much from a defined superior taste as from an instinctive shrinking from any thing *bizarre*. Her tastes were like her own sweet nature, subdued and chaste.

The sun was high in the heavens when they passed José Flores's store on the corner and turned into the main thoroughfare. Now they were indeed in town, and the *avenida principal* was one great confusion.

"Let's go to the church first," pleaded 'Cension, when Placido had safely disposed of the horses. So they climbed the few rough steps to the elevation where the old adobe cathedral stood. The recumbent gravestones of ancient dates in the yard and the strange old pewless interior were ever interesting to 'Cension. These worn stones about her feet, their mortuary art and illegible lettering, seemed to her a sorrowful rebuke to mourners who would fain have

declared the lasting nature of their grief. She looked down upon these once immaculate tributes, and wondered if the knees of penitents in their journeys to and from the sacred edifice had not helped in wearing away their chiselled encomiums. In her simplicity she wondered why, after all, the living should persist in proclamations of eternal regret for the dead, which are so often proven a lie by the after-conduct of the inconsolable. The flowers she or Pablo laid daily upon Ysidora's grave seemed to her so much more honest—they would last no longer than their grief. A pair of patent-hinged green doors ornamented with brass tacks had taken the place of the worm-eaten, hand-carved, solid wood curiosities that 'Cension saw when last there, and showed the growth of American enterprise. This seemed indeed sacrilegious,

and her heart was filled with indignation at the stupid creatures for this brand-new silk patch in the poor old threadbare garment. So incongruous was it as to be ludicrous.

They all stopped at the font, and dipping their fingers in the holy water, devoutly crossed themselves; then going forward, the party knelt on the bare floor, with many others, and told their beads.

There was a small coffin covered with red calico and cotton lace deposited on the altar of the infant Jesus on the left. The accompanying mourners knelt and squatted about, awaiting the *padre's* signal when the ceremonies were over. Anita's eyes grew round and startled as the cortege passed near her, and she clutched 'Cension's skirts tightly, and all thoughts of prayer left her mind in watching the funeral procession as the

gay little box was carried into the street. The rollicking, reel-like melody played on the metallic-sounding stringed instruments escorting it still drifted back into the quiet church.

Anita did not believe with her countrymen that it was unreasonable and sinful to grieve for a child that dies. When our troops march along the streets the rabble march with them, as if on duty too, with a defiant-like bearing and an air of announcing that "Americans never, never, shall be slaves;" and the rabble that accompanies the jubilant funeral train of Mexican youth proclaims, by a bearing and expression that says, as plainly, "*Niños* never, never, should be grown up!"

'Cension's devout heart was always full of pleasure in her few opportunities of kneeling here, where it all seemed so much nearer heaven than in the

primitive church near her home, where the candles were principally furnished by old Placido as penance. He sometimes lost faith in the saints, and sent forth blasphemous beratings when the burros laid down with their packs, or he gambled, and, returning home happy with pulque and profit, pounded Casamira.

Before this beautiful altar of the Divine Mother, where she loved to kneel, it seemed so near heaven 'Cension could forget all problems. The many lights at the chancel looked dim in the large room. To an anti-Romanist it all looked cheerless and little enough like being in the vicinity of heaven's portals. The hand-carved rafters overhead were a gloomy brown from age. The faded images and altar trappings looked absolutely ghastly. Unframed oil paintings on the walls seemed to Anita's excited

fancy to wink their eyes when she looked at them. When the unseen choir in the loft began a weird chanting with a nasal melancholy trail of voices and discordant instrument in accompaniment, it added to the strangeness, but not an iota to the heavenliness, to Anita's mind. She felt sure the drops of blood falling from a heart in a painting over her head were real blood—and implored 'Cension to go.

'Cension rose and signalled to Casamira, who came reluctantly, having been employed with the question of a red or blue *tapalo* for winter, and the probable price of shoes for her noisy progeny. It was time, too, high time for the bull-fight!

The bugle sounded as they entered, and our party dropped into their seats as a large dun-colored bull rushed through the open gates. Ferocious at first, he cowered and refused to make a charge when Artenogenes de la Forre

teased and prodded him with his gaudy darts. In disgust, Fuentes, with a dexterous thrust of a two-edged sword, felled the animal to the ground, and loudly demanded a better. The unworthy contestant was ignominiously dragged away amid shouts, and an animal looking every inch equal to fight rushed out of the gate. With lowered head he dashed madly at a flaunting red cloak waved at him, and his agile tormentor only escaped his vengeance by disappearing behind the strong board shield, forgetting his gracefulness in his hurry.

Suddenly 'Cension's attention was diverted. Could that be Eduardo passing out? Yes, she could never mistake him. And he was looking in their direction, too! Did he not see her when she waved her white handkerchief at him? She thought he must have, and her heart went down like lead as he passed quite

"HER HEART WENT DOWN LIKE LEAD AS HE PASSED OUT OF SIGHT"

out of sight. A sensation of burning heat, then cold, swept over her entire body as she wrestled with the disappointment, or doubt — which was it? A moment later, being hard pressed by his antagonist, the toreador turned swiftly and struck the point of his steel blade through the bull's heart.

The sight made 'Cension faint and sick, and she could stand it no longer. The sight of the poor mutilated beasts, the Mexicans yelling "Bravo!" when the banderillero got the best of the bull; the Americans yelling louder "Bravos!" when the bull tossed the matador up in the air, was altogether enough for 'Cension. She declared she must go, despite Placido and Casamira's protests.

"You are a fine Mexican," growled Placido, "too poor-spirited to see the bull-fight!"

"I think it is cruel and dreadful,"

declared 'Cension, warmly, and Anita pressed her hand approvingly.

They met Pablo outside, but he begged them to go on, as he would stay to see the fireworks of the evening, and consult with the *jefe politico* about the next day's programme, especially the *oraciones*.

'Cension cared nothing for these patriotic effusions, and felt even very little respect for the rather insignificant brown bust of Juarez on its pedestal of Orizaba marble, though it had been sent by Diaz himself. She told Pablo that she had met Señores Alverez and Candano, who wanted to speak to him in regard to the parade. Telling him they would not wait, after making their modest purchases at *La tienda Europa*—among other things a pretty red celluloid thimble as a surprise for the mother—they started homeward.

It was a silent party on the return journey. The reaction had come. Verily there is no present tense to perfect peace; it is indeed an infinitive of the future only. 'Cension felt a deep sense of depression that would not vanish at her bidding, and she watched the coming sunset with absently conscious interest. The parting tints made glad all nature as the sunset-gun from Fort Bliss echoed faintly down the valley, "swinging low with sullen roar," and the Angelus from the old cathedral came with a distant mournful cadence. Even the broncos drooped their heads in an injured, disconsolate way.

When they finally drew up before the house, Casamira drew forth a neat little package of narrow bits of corn husks, shook an accurately gauged little heap of tobacco upon one of the bits, and dexterously rolled a cigarette before leaving

her perch. Placido, still sulky, dragged his cramped old legs down from his elevated seat with a grunt of general disapproval of the whole day. 'Cension and Anita both felt a deep satisfaction at being at home again, all the bright anticipations of the morning to the contrary notwithstanding.

"We shall not want you to take us to see the statue of Juarez unveiled tomorrow, Placido," said 'Cension, quietly. "We do not care to go." But unrelenting Placido only grunted again, derisively, knowing that 'Cension would not be offended by his gruffness.

"You are very late," complained Doña Liseta, when 'Cension kissed her with a warmth of manner as if it had been a long absence, or as if some inward discontent were solaced by the comfort of mother love. "I am afraid the *frijoles* and *tamales* are cold," she

went on, following the girls as they went to the table.

But no such annoyance awaited them. The neatly heaped *tamales* were steaming in their clean shuck wrappings, and the dark *frijoles* were piping hot. As 'Cension slowly removed a plump *tamale's* coat she answered her mother's questions about the day, letting Anita chatter on with uninterrupted details. It was plainly evident she neither felt much interest for the day's doings now, nor appetite for the late meal. Then the boys rushed in, full of excitement, shouting, "Oh, *madre*, it was grand!" the younger one bringing up the rear still echoing the reiteration of the day, "Vive la Mejico!" which had evidently lodged in his thick head in great numbers, and kept popping out spasmodically.

'Cension took this opportunity to slip quietly out.

An hour later she went to her favorite place under a great cottonwood, and, seating herself, sang soft, pathetic little songs, accompanying herself upon the guitar. She had a charming voice, most natural and sweet, and the good Sister Josefa had taught her carefully. She kept on with song after song, then glided into the sweet, swinging melody of "La Golondrina":

"Adonde ira veloz y fatigada,
La golondrina que de aqui se va,
Oh si en el viento gemira angustiada,
Buscando abrigoy no lo encontrara!
Junto a mi lecho le pondre su nido
En donde puede la estacion pasar
Tambien yo estoy en la region perdido,
Oh! cielo santo y sin poder volar."

III

Next morning Eduardo Lerma presented himself, yearning for a sight of her face. 'Cension trembled as if it were a question of life or death to her as she asked him if he had not seen her in the amphitheatre *ayer*. He told his lie with composure. She believed him in the natural simplicity of her heart. Seen her, of course he had seen her; but how was he to have had the moral courage to attach himself to this little dowdy (alas, for the dreams of the lavender print!) country-girl, even if she were beautiful as a houri, with Jesusita Barassa's black eyes always upon him?

"The odium of deception falls upon the deceiver, not the deceived." One

need not declare that this man enjoyed lying. He hardly seemed like those strange ones of the genus *homo* who really prefer telling a lie when the truth would serve as well. He believed in little; if he had any theory of life, it was, that the world consisted of wolves and lambs, and one must make his choice as to which flock he would belong. When it served his purpose to lie or deceive he did it boldly and well as only such creatures can.

"I enjoyed nothing of yesterday's doings, since I missed seeing you," he went on, dejectedly, enjoying the rosy blush the words brought to her face. He was not unlike the Spanish surgeon who used to stab people in the street, then hasten to succor them with all the resources of his art. It would be unpardonable for such a practitioner to forget his lint or waylay his bandages.

Lerma enjoyed each wound and antidote he gave this frank creature, playing with her confidence as a child would turn a piece of Labrador spar, delighted at the gorgeous colors thrown from its lustreless angles.

They were standing in the *patio*. It seemed to Eduardo that the girl's beauty glowed and ripened like the tints of the autumn. He watched her movements as she waved her hand at a drowsy bee that sailed too near. All at once he felt that even for Jesusita Barassa he could not loose this perfect creature! A shameful, cruel inspiration came to him; perhaps not a sudden one.

"Why can we not go to Ysleta now, 'Cension?" he asked, caressingly. She was surprised—puzzled.

"Father Salvini has gone to Las Cruces. We could not be married now. You

know that I wish no other priest to bless us." She looked at him earnestly.

"'Cension! you love me, do you not? And love is all, anyway," he answered, watching her narrowly, and using the self-same words that have been used the world over by such as he. "I would have you for my own, let the *padre* go where he will." He finished rather lamely, looking attentively at the tapering brown fingers he held.

The poison of the suggestion passed over the innocent heart like the trailing raindrops on the holly leaf, which shows no dampness but only an added polish from their passing.

"Pablo would not like me to go to Ysleta unless he went too."

At the mention of her brother's name a change came over the tempter's face. "Eduardo," she went on, softly, "I hate to see you care so little for the church.

You speak so lightly of the sacraments —and Padre Salvini says marriage is the holiest of them all."

The callous man standing there felt his hideous designs rebound upon himself with a strange sensation.

"Why do you look at me so, Eduardo? You do not doubt that I love you? Ah, dear heart, you could never do that. When the priest gave us his blessing in the dear church, I felt how happy, how very happy I would be always. I sometimes fear my great love displeases the saints. Sometimes I feel that they are not smiling upon me. It is so strange that you care about me, Eduardo! I am such a simple girl, and you—you are so grand."

He was silent. He dared not tell her that by right of her beauty and purity he was compared to her as things of darkness to the brightest of God's crea-

tions. So he led the conversation into other channels, spoke of the *baile* at the Teatro Juarez on Tuesday evening, a part of the festivities in Paso del Norte; and took his departure, feeling far from satisfied with himself.

He cursed himself as he rode along because he could not give up all thought of the girl he left standing there in the September sunlight! But the trustfulness of the nature he was dealing with was incomprehensible to his own. A doubt flashed over him that perhaps her apparent innocence was only a woman's trick of affecting to believe—a bit of feminine craft, "that," he said to himself, with spiteful malignity, "they all trade upon as long as they are young and good-looking," and that she *did* understand! He was morbidly anxious and uneasy for all his self-assurance, and, not unlike the gambling husband whose

courtesies to his wife are the measure of his luck at play, the discouraging nature of the late interview made him sneer at the trustfulness that was yet so difficult to manipulate. Well, one thing was certain: Pablo Dorantes would hunt him down if he kept up this thing. Dorantes might even now be making "inquiries." By all the saints, that — that would not do! He must bring things to a crisis with Jesusita, and leave these parts.

Jesusita was shrewd, quick-witted, daring—just the wife he needed. An ugly smile came over his face as he thought that Jesusita's scruples about "holy sacraments" would not interfere with his plans; and he sealed her doom as he rode along. What was a woman more or less? Jesusita was desperately in love with his precious self. He had taken care that she should be, and

Paso del Norte might soon be on the alert.

Crossing the main *acequia* in the centre of the town, Eduardo turned to the right. He tied his horse to a post, and tapped with his riding-whip upon a heavy, closed door, flanked on either side by barred windows which opened directly on the street. Jesusita did not keep him waiting long. She came hastily towards him in the half-light that filtered through the narrow, deep-set windows.

Jesusita Barassa was as good-looking as the average girl in her set. She did not lack for attention at the frequent *bailes*, and was, besides, blessed with a good intellect and attractiveness much above the average. She greeted Lerma enthusiastically, and smiled and chatted in a happy, abandoned fashion that might well justify that gentleman in

his feelings of security about her regard for himself.

"I thought you must be at the plaza hearing the orations this morning," she said. "We are all going over to El Paso this afternoon, after the concert. I expected we might come upon you there; we can return in time for the fireworks," and she smiled pointedly.

"No," he answered, "I have been down in the country this morning;" and up came another comparison—the lovely-tinted cream face and wonderful hazel eyes of 'Cension.

"Why not join us, then?"

"Perhaps I may, certainly I shall if you wish it," and Jesusita was pleased at his evident submission to her sway. The male heart is a tough piece of anatomy, and requires a good deal of manipulation to make it manageable.

But every woman thinks it easily done, in the halcyon days of love.

"Will we not do anything for one we love?" he questioned, looking steadily into her eyes. His was not a young face, not a face to be trusted, unless Dame Nature had erred grievously in the markings there. He must have counted at least thirty-eight birthdays, but this girl's eyes fell before his as she thought how handsome, how delightful he was.

She answered without looking up, "Yes, anything, if one love truly."

"Would you go—anywhere that he should wish, Jesusita, with the man you loved?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"To the ends of the earth—with him," and there was a very conscious look on her face as she said it.

"But if he had enemies, and they told you dreadful things of him, even

if you felt yourself that he was a weak fellow," and he drew nearer to her and looked intently into her face.

She seemed almost nervous as she answered, quickly:

"But, Eduardo, there is — there is nothing that I could fear that they could tell me of you, unless it was that you did not love me," she said, discarding his half-mysterious pronouns. "I fear nothing, while you love me. As for your acts — while I might grieve over your faults," and a troubled look passed over her face, "I could not desert you. No, Eduardo, it is done. I love you now; all the rest cannot much matter." She put both hands out to him, and sudden tears filled her eyes.

Neither dared put into words this something of which he was guilty and she cognizant. He was uncertain as to "how much she knew," but very cer-

tain now that it would not separate her from him—if he chose to take her!

Why did he determine to sacrifice this girl? He evidently did not love her with the mad passion which filled him for 'Cension's beauty. She adored him, perhaps that was reason enough.

Jesusita was not over-scrupulous or burdened with an undue share of respect for the mother-church, as Eduardo very justly argued. But she was far from being a bad woman. She was simply a self-willed, passionate woman, like half of her sex, who if meeting no great temptation will go to their graves harmless, almost sinless women. When a stumbling-block rises in their pathway they know not how to brook the obstacle, and in a reckless moment dare to leap — and fall. Jesusita — she was only twenty — would have been more shocked than innocent 'Cension, if she

had understood, at a proposition made to her like that made to 'Cension that morning. She would have understood its meaning, and shrunk from its consequences. Clinging to him even when she knew him to be guilty of crime, she would yet be as far from yielding to sin as 'Cension. The one's knowledge on the one side was perhaps as great a safeguard as the other's innocence.

As the prearranged party boarded the horse-cars for El Paso that afternoon Lerma did not feel more comfortable for seeing Pablo Dorantes come out of Señor Herara's office; for that gentleman believed, with the *alcalde*, that others besides the two convicted post-office officials had had a hand in those recent robberies. He had furthermore boldly declared his determination to ferret the culprits out.

Lerma felt a stronger admonisher of

the morning whispering him that delays might be dangerous. He devoted himself more assiduously to Jesusita than ever before, and left her at home that night with a heart beating high with hope and love.

What need to trouble one's self with the eternal possibilities? One can take the world with its company clothes on, and need never see it in *dishabille*. Life has two sides, and one must contrive to spin the coin so that the face of the metal will come uppermost. Such was Jesusita's creed, and she was one who might have skill in the spinning, but she underestimated the importance of "heads or tails" in the result. She looked no further than the hour's fulfilment, and when the obstacle would arise in her pathway she would leap — with the usual result. Nature produces both the deadly night-shade and the succu-

lent berry, and leaves for us to choose whether we will seek our nutriment in the tangled wild growth or in the sunny meadows.

IV

At ten o'clock that night Eduardo Lerma tapped mysteriously at a little board door in one of those half-houses, half-dugouts built under the hill-side beyond the church. He was admitted by a red-eyed, ancient specimen of mankind, who mumbled a few words, lifted a blanket partition disclosing another room, and motioned the visitor to enter. Lerma stooped his broad shoulders and disappeared, the soiled hanging falling again into place.

The sound of voices within kept up a continuous murmur that the miserable old creature in the front did not seem to notice. With his deformed back for capital, he had all day, like

"Bartimeus by the way-side, begged his bread disconsolate"—and three *tortillas* had been his collection. What bread is to us, rice to the Chinaman, poi to the Hawaiian, *tortilla* is to the Mexican; and this wretched semblance of a human creature expected nothing more of the world he lived in than a few of these leathery life-sustainers.

"There is nothing new?" Lerma was asking.

"Nothing, señor," answered the heavy-set, heavy-jawed man across the plank table. "There is no reason to feel uneasy. How could your señorita have learned of your part in the job?"

"Don't speak so loud," commanded Lerma, looking nervously around. "*Jesucristo* only knows, but she does. But I have no fear from that quarter," he went on, as he drummed softly on the table.

There was a wicked look of hate on the other's heavy face as he watched his complacent accomplice.

"She may squeal; may put it down your thievish throat in a way you won't like," he blurted out, scowling at the other.

"The only thing that beats your courage is your candor," answered Lerma, with a dark look. "Don't mention her again," he added, darkly, "but tell me what Fleury said when you got into his cell."

"He said you need not be afraid, that he wouldn't 'wink.' That he felt almost relieved now that they had caught him again, and that he had been a fool to escape."

"Fool! He was a bigger fool to go to Chuviscar, where Garvaldon had such a good chance to take them," commented Lerma.

"Secretary Rojas told them that sentence would not be passed before next month."

"Well, I'll take care not to be here," chuckled Lerma, "for the poor devils will find it hard not to have me scooped in, too."

"He said to-day that if you hadn't sent me to *la tienda Londres* with that last haul of diamonds he gave you, and told that gag about their having been sent from Guadalajara, they would not have suspected him yet."

"He lies!" exclaimed Lerma, excitedly. "It would have come all right if he hadn't hidden those stones in his room, where he was idiot enough to keep them against my advice. He deserves the fifteen years he'll get for being such a fool as to let them find them there."

"He may not be fool enough to take the fifteen years by himself, when oth-

ers could so easily be made to go with him," said Lerma's companion, glaring across the dirty table.

"Look here, Eleno Telles," cried Lerma, getting to his feet, "for a man who kills helpless widows and knows another holds the guilty knife, you presume on that other's goodness when you talk to him like this. I'll give that bloody knife to Señora Maese's counsel, and—" snapping his fingers contemptuously—"you'll be shot."

"Sit down, my fine friend. I don't think you will trot out that knife. We have even scores."

Lerma sank back into his chair. How he would like to throttle this fellow! Not only for his complicity, but from pure malice. The world has scores of unprincipled fellows who, when their own ends are gained, are tolerably indifferent about the rest of humanity. They

"I'LL GIVE THAT BLOODY KNIFE TO SENORA WASE'S COUNSEL."

even at times have their little moods of generosity, when they will help a fellow-blackguard or a beggar, and actually seem good-natured and kind after a fashion; but Lerma, "swimming for his life, would like to crack the fellow fatally on the head that swam alongside of him." Feeling the practised skill that intercourse with crime confers, he hated sharing either craft or spoils. Such fellows almost destroy the long-treasured belief that there is no heart so depraved that it has no redeeming trait.

A shrewd observer says, when one carries a load with another man it is not always easy to believe that the other "totes fair." If he shows signs of weariness or exhaustion, we inveigh against him as good-for-nothing; if he steps along jauntily and briskly, while we feel done up, we are convinced that he is shirking or cheating. A divided guilt

is a harder burden to carry together in faith than any other.

Later, when Lerma came out of the inner room, he looked scornfully at the old watcher dozing on his haunches by the door, and, touching him with his foot, said, sarcastically, "Wake up, my prince, and open the door;" and as he struggled to his feet he threw two *tlacos* on the dirt floor, saying, gruffly, "There's for your *tortillas*," and stepped out impatiently as the poor creature commenced mumbling extravagant thanks.

As he passed the barred windows of the post-office he glanced in, and snapped his fingers airily at the dim light within. "When the cute ones were on the inside, bars did not much matter," he soliloquized, smiling a smile that neither 'Cension nor Jesusita had ever seen on the handsome face.

He fell to wondering how the latter

had ever discovered his light-fingered occupation. Shrewd as was this man's reckoning, he could not know that Jesusita had suspected, surmised, had put two and two together, and by a woman's innuendoes gathered the truth for herself from his own lips and manner. But if he thought she knew anything of his life before he came to Paso del Norte, of any other but this one transaction, he was mistaken. She knew nothing. How should she?

Perhaps if she had, she might have done differently. Who knows? Women are queer creatures, and sometimes seem willing to give up, even do give up, all that they are supposed to hold dearest and best on what seems to the unbiassed observer to be the smallest provocation. Scores of women, we note with sorrow, seem to like publicity, and prefer notoriety for scandal rath-

er than be only unnoticed models of virtue.

Perhaps even jealousy of 'Cension might have given the one straw's weight necessary to have decided Jesusita's fate; but she did not know that Eduardo knew the girl. No, it was not jealous rage, or a thorough understanding of the object's worthlessness, which actually does seem to influence some unhappy specimens of women. Nor yet was it a woman's unseemly yearning after the forbidden or sin-cursed that influenced this girl in the final test. It was what she believed to be her heart's love pure and simple; and nothing more wicked was in her heart than a woman's unwillingness to see the unworthy in her heart's desire.

V

As the day drew nearer for the ball Eduardo had told her of, the desire grew stronger and stronger in 'Cension's heart to go herself, seen or unseen, and get a view of this other world of his. She had never attended a ball in all her short life, and as yet she had formed no definite idea of how she was to get there; but the determination to see it for herself became a fixed resolve by the morning of the eventful day.

She would ask Pablo. With beating heart she went into the *patio* where her brother, with Placido and the two boys, was arranging to hang the long strings of peppers, garlics, grapes, and pumpkin strips for the winter, while bushels of

silver-skinned mammoth onions were heaped against the wall ready for storing. 'Cension hesitated when she saw the others there, and stood looking at Pablo doubtfully. He had lifted a string of grapes and stood sadly gazing across the fields at the half-finished walls of his home, and as he gazed his face settled into that look of hopeless regret it so often wore in these latter months. Her gentle heart smote her for her selfish forgetfulness of his sorrow.

Ask Pablo to go to a ball! Never. How could she have been so heartless? And she went to his side, and put her hand gently, caressingly, on his shoulder, in sweet contrition for the unkind thoughtlessness which she felt had been in her mind.

"Let me help, too, Pablo," she pleaded. "I can tie and string very fast—indeed I can; just try me," she said, smil-

ing. "And Placido, you needn't look so doubtful. Did I not help you weave a chair once?"

And Placido, remembering, screwed up a very tight facial contortion, which passed for a smile, and said, very slowly, "*Si, señorita*, you did undo 'most as fast as I could weave." And the two boys pranced wildly around and enjoyed the stupendous joke, very much like a pair of American younger brothers indeed.

Pablo smiled, too, and it brought a beautiful sparkle to his deep-brown eyes, showed his perfect teeth, and changed his face like magic. If one thought him handsome before, these rare smiles made his face simply irresistible, and markedly like 'Cension's own.

"I'm afraid there's not much you can do, *hermanita*, but you may hold this cord and help me with this lot, if you would like."

They all worked away, and 'Cension, still contrite, chatted and smiled brightly at Pablo, hoping in her loving heart that he found comfort in her presence. And he did. Possessing generous, beautiful natures, they were deeply attached to each other, and their love had known nothing of those jealousies and misunderstandings too common in the elder members of families. 'Cension was never in his way, nothing where she was concerned was ever a trouble to him, and she, full of pride in this handsome, unselfish big brother, loved nothing better than his companionship. As for the topic of Lerma, just now Pablo saw nothing to be gained by filling his sister's mind with all manner of misgivings and unhappiness concerning the man she loved without being able then and there to say, "Give him up at once and forever." And he was not quite ready

to sustain his position should the fellow defy him. He did not doubt that when that time came, 'Cension would obey him without a word. He anxiously admitted that the unmasking would be a blow, a heavy one, to her trusting heart, but he comforted himself by thinking how very young she was, and that she would soon forget it. Pablo had, for reasons of his own, determined to go to the interior of the Republic during the following week, and he felt absolutely certain that when he returned he would be well armed to approach Señor Lerma.

The bright September sunlight shone warmly down upon the *patio* and the workers there. Pablo's large fawn-colored mastiff, Bonito, that followed 'Cension's every step, had stretched himself languidly in the sun, and would have been in Elysium but for two bees. Heavy from an apician feast of drying apples,

they seemed to be in the world for no other object than the tantalizing of his sleepy dogship.

"Bonito, you are *no bueno!*" cried the smaller of the shock-headed brothers. "Why don't you gobble up them bees?"

"Bonito, perhaps, has tried eating bees before, and does not like the diet," laughed Pablo; and the big dog raised his eyes lazily to his face, and thumped his tail in two approving raps on the hard mud court.

"Oh, Bonito, you do so seem to know everything one says," said 'Cension. "Don't you really think, Pablo," she went on, tying a double knot in her twine, "that animals, especially dogs and horses, get to know a person who loves them so well that they understand what he says?" And Bonito again rapped his acquiescence *à la* table-rapping ayes.

Pulling Pablo's sleeve to attract his

attention to the dog, she said, in an excited voice, "Why, Pablo, those must be goats over there in the vineyard!"

Lazy Bonito was up and off like a shot, rushing through the opening at the end of the corral. 'Cension clapped her hands and laughed sweet peals of laughter, which still rang out as Bonito walked quietly back to his place after having inspected the vineyard from a heap of adobes beyond; whether or no he knew that he had been duped was kept carefully to himself in dogged silence.

"I do believe, you dear *perro*, that you are disgusted with me for that mean trick," said 'Cension, stooping and patting his square head. "It was mean, Bonito, old fellow," she said, again, as she doubled another twine for Pablo.

"Of course dogs knows everything," exclaimed Placido, in a very determined

voice, as if defending the question in a close argument. "Didn't he bring that little kid, *pobrecita*, straight to the señora when he found it with its leg broke under that *tornillo* bush?" Bonito only deigned to notice this last reference by one flabby tap, and kept on dozing with one eye, while he kept the other sharply upon the more aggressive bee.

"I say, 'Cension, I heard Eduardo Lerma telling you about the *baile* tonight; why don't you ever go to *bailes*, like Guadalupe? You could wear that pretty pink dress, and put white stuff on your face, like Guadalupe does;" and the small brother looked inquiringly into his sister's face as he delivered this shrewd half-question, half-advice.

"Would you really care to go to balls, 'Cension?" asked Pablo, kindly, turning his glance to the work in hand.

Poor sensitive 'Cension felt an overwhelming fear that Pablo understood her intention of an hour before, and meant to sacrifice himself to her selfishness, and she answered, hurriedly and nervously, "Dear Pablo, it does not in the least matter. I do not even know what a ball is like."

Balls in general did not much matter, truly, but this particular ball—that mattered very much indeed.

Presently she entered the house feeling miserable, anxious, unhappy, for the consuming desire to go to this ball could not be overcome. The longing was still unshaken.

When the family party gathered under the arches around the *patio* in the moonlight, 'Cension sat near her father and absently watched the shadows from the trees outside. She did not hear a word of the mixed conversation going on, and

was brought sharply to herself by a quick sound that startled her. It was only Ricardo who, in telling them of the dreadful results sure to follow in consequence of the Americans opening canals from their dividing Rio Grande, had nailed his argument with his fist to the broad arm of his bench.

"I wonder if it is time for them to gather in the ballroom," she thought. "I wonder if Eduardo is already there," and her hands clasped and unclasped themselves nervously as she pictured it all. A sudden thought rushed into her mind. Why should she not go alone to Paso del Norte? She could ride gentle Prieto; no, Placido, and then all the rest would know. She would not be permitted to go. She would walk! Young and strong of limb, the intervening miles were nothing to her, and there was nothing to fear. Slipping

quietly away unnoticed, she went to her own room, which Anita shared, and stood before the pink *vestido* of Ynocente's mention that hung on the wall.

The little sister breathed regular, restful-slumber breaths, and everything seemed to 'Cension's excited fancy to be painfully still. She took the dress down in slow indecision. What need to put it on? She would not go, and, besides, if she did, she would go unseen, so what need to change her dress? But fearing that Lerma might see her, with a woman's instinctive second nature of wanting to appear well in the eyes of the man she loves, she held it thoughtfully in her hands. The next moment determination came to her. She hurriedly unbuttoned the striped *indiana* she had worn all day, and with shaking hands arrayed herself in the unpretentious pink frock—her

best. With a hurried glance into the small mirror hanging on the wall, she caught up her black shawl and disappeared through a door to the left.

She came out at the extreme end of the row of rooms at the back, and, entering the alfalfa field, walked quickly towards the point where the hedge marked the lane's joining with the public road. She hesitated a moment, and looked nervously up and down the road before coming out into the bright moonlight. The sound of Nature's respirations was all around. The branches swayed softly, and the intermittent gusts of air that were warmly caressing somehow seemed suggestive of a vague companionship and sympathy, as they rustled past, leaving "the pendent leaves nodding understandingly." Moonlight in this latitude and this altitude means something more than a pale, sickly glim-

mer which makes dim phantoms of every-day harmless things. It pours a flood of brightness below that marks every outline and curve in clear-cut precision, lacquers every leaf and twig in cleanest finish beneath. To-night there was not a cloud. The majestic canopy, "with God's name writ on it in worlds," was an expanse of subdued perfect blue. The faint, far-away bark of a dog traversed the silence, and the somnolent hills looked strangely distinct to her through the semilucent night haze. Should she go on? But why not? It could not be wrong, and she was not afraid of the night.

Suddenly there was a rushing sound in the alfalfa field at her back. She dared not look around. It must be they had missed her already, and some one was running through the field to intercept her. She stood quite still,

awaiting the result in deep agitation, not so much from dread of detection as fear of disappointment.

The pursuer came close up to her as if undecided, then she felt a cold nose thrust into her palm.

"*O la buena fortuna!* It is only Bonito. Dear Bonito, I should have known, and taken you into my confidence," she whispered, laying her hand on his great head.

She did not hesitate now, but walked firmly along on the scant brown grass by the dusty road, and the big dog walked knowingly by her side. Her eyes were often raised to the blue immensity above, and she occasionally spoke to her companion. There was a look of sweetest innocence on the oft-uplifted face, despite the deliberate errand of the wayward feet. She had no thought of fear, and though her pulses quickened slight-

ly once or twice at an undefined shadow or movement by the way, she went bravely ahead. There was a resonance in the dead silence about her, "the hymnal service of whispering leaf and listening grass spear," that elated her. Her way lay along the brownest, homeliest common, but the moon made of it a splendid highway. She was conscious of no fatigue after travelling the long miles between, when she found herself near the goal—the brightly lighted Teatro Juarez, where the beaux and *junta patriotica* of Paso del Norte hold their carnivals. It is a most unpretentious, ugly structure; but the long wooden building, with unceiled interior, small windows, and two very scraggy trees by the door, was a vision of beauty to 'Cension. The rough walls were hidden by white cloth, enlivened with flags and bright-colored buntings; the ele-

vated stage at the end where the musicians sat was also draped with flags of the United States and Mexico, and a carpet and canvas covered the floor for the dancers. The ball was at its height, and 'Cension felt absolutely unhappy and solitary as she drew nearer the door and looked within. Her sensitive color came and went as she felt half sorry that she had dared so much; and she stood tremblingly hesitating what to do next.

There was the usual rabble around the entrance. Señores Seijas, Najera, Montes, Castillo, and Blanco—the reception committee—only gave it a very divided attention now. A number of half-grown boys jostled and crowded each other roughly on the steps, and one gave Bonito a dreadful kick, and insolently asked, "What is that great brute doing here?" Bonito was not to be driven

from his charge, and, though 'Cension's eyes flashed indignantly, she dared not speak, and only laid her hand protectingly on her companion's head.

Where was Eduardo? She forgot the rude youths and everything else as she watched the moving mass intently for the familiar figure. An old man in shabby breeches and *serape*, just inside the door, touched her shoulder and said, "*Páse V, señorita*," and motioned to a vacant chair against the wall. There were so many figures blocking up the entrance that she could see nothing clearly, and she realized with an aching thrill of her limbs that she was, after all, very tired; so she slipped quietly into the chair with a grateful nod at the thoughtful old man.

She could see much better now. Her eyes were fixed in fascination upon a pretty blonde from El Paso, gowned in

a lovely blue crêpe, when she saw Lerma pass, walking down the room.

He was there, then! She was so glad she had come. She was beginning to feel a happy enjoyment of it all diffuse itself through her whole being. A kind of unreal sensation possessed her; she felt intoxicated with the lights and music and the pretty dresses in a whirl of kaleidoscopic brightness. She lost Lerma's figure immediately, but what matter? He was here and she was here, and she could have laughed joyously aloud in the thought that she had so nearly given up this great happiness.

"Oh, Bonito, just think, if we hadn't come!" And she bowed her head a moment over the big ears of the sedate guardian sitting against her chair. Bonito looked every inch his importance at having brought his mistress to such a fine place, though to his canine judg-

ment it all looked very senseless and hardly worth that long, dusty walk.

The figures moved off into the *danza*, and as the instruments struck up the swinging little jerky measures, she saw Lerma dancing with Guadalupe Gonzales. Yes, Ynocente was right; there was a goodly supply of "white stuff" on her slightly pock-marked face; but with pink cloth flowers in her hair, and tacked in aimless distribution about her blue gown, she was looking well satisfied and happy.

"Oh, Guadalupe, if you only knew I was sitting here watching you, what would you think?" And 'Cension smiled in imagination of her neighbor's surprise and the great fun she was having all to herself.

She watched the figures as the dance proceeded, and smiled as the couples of Americans dropped out one by one, un-

able to do the monotonous swaying of forward and back while the man's arm encircled the woman's waist. The señoritas' gowns of pink, blue, green, red, and yellow, much trimmed in cloth flowers, inexpensive lace, and colored buttons, were ideal gowns to 'Cension's uninitiated eyes, and she felt as if she could stay here all night, and wondered idly what the hour was.

The *danza* over, a *cuadrilla* was danced, then the strains of "Sobre las Olas" filled the room. The Americans would not be left out on this number, and the floor was soon one mad rush of whirling couples that jostled, and bumped, and collided in a dreadful way. The Mexican pairs turned frantically in their dizzy rounds in one spot, while the Americans, with well-directed glides and reverses, went in and out and through the spinning pairs with won-

derful skill and not much regard for courtesy.

'Cension's attention was attracted to the hopeless attempt of a pretty stranger to stammer her excuses to a well-oiled, faultlessly-gotten-up Mexican before her, who was determined to have a dance. Her escort came to the rescue, and explained to the bewildered beauty that etiquette in Mexico did not require an introduction to give a man the "open sesame" to a woman's card of dances. She was thinking the pouting malcontent very pretty, when she noticed that couples were passing through the door to the supper-tables, spread in the adjoining low-roofed apartment.

They passed very near her. And then she saw Eduardo coming down the line with Jesusita Barassa on his arm! She knew it was Jesusita by instinct. She was arrayed in the bright blue gown

she had spent so much thought upon the foregoing week, and poor 'Cension shrank back in her seat, a sickening fear coming over her that Lerma might recognize her.

She felt shabby, ugly, horrid, for the first time in her untroubled life, and she could hardly resist the frantic desire to cover her face, herself, in the shawl that still remained over her shoulders. Oh, why had she come! She should certainly die if her beloved raised his eyes and saw her there in the rabble, so like one of the rabble herself, she thought frantically. Hot tears filled her eyes and a choking feeling came into her throat. How could this grand man care for a poor, little, ignorant, dowdy thing like herself! It was impossible; he must love that splendid creature on his arm; and a shadow of renunciation touched her, and she felt half mad with something, she did not know what.

"Oh, Bonito, why did you not tell me not to come here, into this strange, beautiful world that is not for me!" And wise Bonito seemed to think how useless would have been his advice as he looked in quiet amazement at the unhappy change that had come over his mistress.

Several women near her rose and started out, and one kindly stopped and asked her if she would not like to come and see the supper-room. She got up mechanically and followed them, glad to move, to do something. She looked in upon the narrow table that reached the length of the room. The men stood behind the women's chairs, and there was much popping of corks and clinking of glasses. Her eyes traversed the line of upright figures and stopped about the middle of the left row, where Lerma was bending towards Jesusita's

shoulder and she was smiling up at him.

Agony that was physical pain shot through 'Cension's heart. She felt as if she must cry aloud. The quick breath made the woman nearest turn and look fixedly at her. How could Eduardo look at his companion like that? Was it not the same look that always made her heart beat so madly? She felt wounded unto death; she did not know what could be the matter with her. She would go home —she never could enter that gay room again; she was sick at heart, and it had no further interest for her. She felt no desire to torture herself with the sight of the two before her, like many a one would have felt, and see it through, but, like the child of nature that she was, she only longed to creep away into the solitude and hide her wound like the gentle doe with the fatal bullet burning in her flesh.

They were leaving the table; Señor Lerma was tenderly replacing Señorita Barassa's lace scarf, and he bent his head in lover-like fashion while the girl smiled brightly into his face. Poor 'Cension could not move; she seemed rooted to the narrow boards under her feet, and even all fear of recognition faded from her mind. They passed so near she could have touched his arm, but she made no sign, and the woman, turning a moment later to speak to her, found her gone.

"Not *sola!*" ejaculated the good soul. "Who was with her?" But no one knew, and the subject of their conjectures was then walking along the cobble-stone pavement beyond, not alone, indeed, for Bonito kept even pace with the quick footsteps.

Fortunately he could not ask questions, though he seemed to interrogate

them plainly enough in his gait and his frequently elevated nose. What had come to his mistress that she ignored his very presence at her side? and why that tense look on her face? He could stand it no longer when they turned into "lover's lane." He pressed himself against her and looked anxiously up into her face.

"Oh, Bonito, Bonito, if he does not love me any more I shall die! *Madre de Dios*, I shall die!" she sobbed, throwing her hands outward and upward in the expressive gesticulation which is so much a part of these Southerners' natures.

Poor child, she did not know the meaning of the word jealousy, but the green-eyed monster had entered and taken possession of her being. Lavish of all emotions, desperately in earnest in all she did, this new suffering was only in the same degree terrible as was

the giving of her life's love entire, irrevocable, complete.

The beauty of the night was naught to her now. She was only conscious of thinking wearily how long the way was. But this girl's tender heart was wounded, not revengeful. "The heart of Nature beat so near, its pulses regulate her own." Gradually the calm of the night comforted her. Her test had been as a fever, commencing in delirium, gradually taking on the intermittent stages of vacillating doubt, until each return, becoming less frequent and less severe, the "equilibrium of peace" was restored.

She spoke aloud to Bonito as a distant chanticleer threw his note out upon the stillness.

"We should not have gone, old fellow; Saint Francis has punished me for my curiosity. I do not understand things

now, but it will all come right," she softly added, murmuring the saintly name again, and crossing herself slowly. "It is wicked to feel like this, Bonito," she went on, brightening. "*Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* will not forget me."

She walked on some distance in silence, then said:

"*Mira! mira!* Bonito, how the trees stand forward to meet us," and catching him by his collar she hurried forward. "The hedge looks sorry that we went, but the alfalfa nods to see us back so safe — if not so happy," she added, regretfully.

They found the house in utter darkness and stillness, and 'Cension raised the latch of her door softly, sure that she had not been missed. She threw herself, just as she was, across the bed at Anita's feet, and soon lost all her misgivings in an exhausted, dreamless

sleep that lasted far into the bright morning; excitement had drugged her like a narcotic. Bonito followed her into the room and stretched himself by the bed, not shirking his association with the night's escapade when they should find her there in the morning.

VI

Anita rubbed her eyes many times when she sat up in the bed next morning. She called, in a subdued excitement, "'Cension! 'Cension!" but the sleeper did not stir. The child slipped out of bed, and, dressing herself hurriedly, went out where she heard Doña Liseta calling the chickens to their morning meal.

"Oh, *madre!*" she cried, "come look at 'Cension. She has not been to bed all night. She is asleep across the bed —with her pink dress on!" the last words in a climax of wonder.

"Child, you must be crazy," the mother said, staring at the excited little face

with a sickening, dreadful fear showing itself in her own.

"No, *mamá*, it is true; come." And Anita caught her mother's hand and hurried her towards the open door.

True, indeed! The unconscious figure looked weary and dust-covered, and the mother stood like one struck dumb and gazed in strange apathy at the sight.

"Where has she been, *mamá?*" questioned Anita, frightened at her mother's expression.

"The saints only know," she was conscious of repeating, but her lips did not move, there was no sound, and she turned and went out through the door like one dazed. Bonito felt that the tug had come, and he rapped repeatedly on the floor and said in his anxious eyes as plainly as ever a dog could, "I was with her, it is all right;" but no notice

was taken of him, and he got up, and, going to the bed, rubbed his nose along one dusty shoe, with a pathetic anxiety in his face to see her awake and explain their late jaunt.

Doña Liseta walked on towards the corral, where she met Pablo coming with an armful of prairie hay for his horse.

"Why, *mamá*, what is the matter?" he exclaimed, gazing into her blanched face.

"Oh, Pablo, you told me not to think about it, and now it is too late. She is lost! she is lost!" and the tensely strung nerves gave way suddenly in a burst of violent weeping.

Pablo dropped his burden on the ground, and, taking his mother's hands, said, in a strange voice:

"Tell me, mother, for Heaven's sake, what you mean. She is not gone?"

"She has been away last night—with

him," she tremblingly articulated. "Oh, Pablo, my heart is broken! My poor 'Cension! my beautiful child!" and her grief was far beyond control now.

A hard, set whiteness came over Pablo's face that one could not have anticipated there, and he looked fixedly at a corner of the wall as if controlling himself before he spoke. "Calm yourself, mother, and tell me all you know."

"I know nothing," she sobbed; "Anita told me. She is asleep on the bed; go see for yourself."

Pablo did not wait, but struck out for the door with strange, long strides. He stood for a moment looking down upon the sleeping figure, his face working like a child's before sensitive tears, and there was a dangerous look riveted there as he raised his right hand menacingly above his head with an upward look.

He still stood silently gazing down upon her when she opened her eyes, and, sitting quickly erect, put her hand before her face in a dazed way, and said:

"What is it, Pablo? What do you want with me?" Then, noticing the pink dress and dusty shoes, she looked up with a rush of color, and said, apologetically, "Oh, Pablo, I was so tired. I meant to undress, but—I—guess I forgot it." She sent a wan little smile up to him, for the unsatisfactory evening had returned to her suddenly.

"Where have you been, 'Cension? Why are you like this? What have you done?" he demanded, sternly.

"Oh, Pablo, please do not be angry with me. Indeed I did not think it would be wrong, and I could not ask you to go to such a place. I meant to tell you this morning if you asked me, and—I am already very unhappy," she

concluded, with a tremble of distress in her voice.

"What do you mean, 'Cension? I insist upon your telling me at once what this means."

"It means that Eduardo does not love me any more, and my heart is broken," she sobbed, plaintively, the long tension on her nerves refusing further strain. "Oh, Pablo, I know he can't love me, after seeing that other woman that loves him too."

"'Cension, tell me, quick — where have you been?"

"To Paso del Norte," she answered.

"Where?"

"To Paso del Norte—to the *baile*."

"Who took you? how did you go?"

"I walked, Bonito and I," and here the escort mentioned thumped dreadfully hard indeed upon the floor. Pablo's face was relaxing; 'Cension was

truth itself, and he felt that he was beginning to understand.

"Do you mean that you walked alone with Bonito last night to see the ball?"

"Yes, Pablo. I did not think it was much of a walk, but I am very tired, after all," and she stood up wearily on her feet. "I did not enjoy it much," she went on, piteously. "Oh, Pablo, do you think Eduardo would love any one else?" Big tears filled the sweet eyes, and Pablo, in his quick sympathy, understanding something of her trouble, said very gently, with his hand on hers,

"Never mind, little girl, he is not worth your thoughts, much less your tears."

He inwardly hoped the fellow had found some one else to turn him from this child; it would be the best way out of it, and the quickest way to cure her of her infatuation. He could not find

it in his heart to scold her now, so he contented himself with saying:

"You ought not to have done it, 'Cension. You should have told me you wanted to go." He motioned to the dog, and Bonito, seeing that hostilities were amicably settled, followed him from the room willingly enough.

He turned towards his mother's room, for he felt she would be there. She sat in a low chair before a small crucifix on the window-sill, rocking herself to and fro monotonously.

"Dear *mamá*, we were dreadfully mistaken. 'Cension has done no wrong! —that is, no dreadful wrong. She only walked to town last night to see the ball. She did not even speak to Lerma!"

"In the name of the blessed Virgin, what put such a thing into her head?" exclaimed Doña Liseta, showing very natural anger in the sudden relief.

"Do not scold her; she is already punished enough, poor little girl," he interposed. "For mercy's sake, never let the child know what we thought. We never should have thought it, mother. Promise me to say as little as possible to her about it — for my sake," he added, as she looked very determined.

"You always ask such queer things, Pablo. One does not know what you will expect next." She spoke in deep irritation, but Pablo wisely held his peace; he knew it would be as he wished, and he quietly left the room with Bonito at his heels.

He stopped by the door, and, dexterously rolling a cigarette between his fingers, looked absently down the road. Yes, this fright redoubled his anxiety, strengthened his purpose, and he made up his mind to broach the subject of his

journey that very day and start on the morrow.

In the quiet of the afternoon, as the trees threw long slanting shadows on the road, 'Cension came slowly along its dusty way, and when near home sprang lightly upon the low adobe wall that ran along one side, and proceeded to sort a bunch of feathery grasses she had gathered in her walk by the fields. She could not have named a species of the lot; they were to her only some of the "beautiful worsteds in Nature's carpet." She had long since carried her troubles to the Mother of Sorrows, and a calm of half-content had returned to her bosom. Pablo came up and touched her hands before she was aware of his presence. She turned two surprised eyes upon her brother.

"You here, Pablo? I fancied you

must be over there," nodding at a solitary square enclosure under some alamos in the field. "When there is so much of heaven all around, I think you could go there in such a time as this, Pablo, and you would forget it was a sorrowful place. You could not think of her as down there, but as already relieved from atonement and with the blessed Mother, who would send comfort to your heart."

"'Cension, it is hard for even religion to comfort such sorrow as mine. But we will not talk of sorrows. I came to tell you that I am going to Mexico tomorrow."

"To the city! Oh, Pablo! Not going away on the railroad again, are you?" she exclaimed, in distress.

"No, no, I am only going for a few days. I will come back just as soon as I can attend to some *negotio* there."

"*Negotio!* Why, Pablo, what busi-

ness can you have down there? You never go on these short trips."

"It is an important matter. I must attend to it in person." He avoided her eyes by looking across the field.

"I will be so *triste*. You won't stay many days?" she questioned, anxiously looking into his face. This going away of Pablo's was very strange, and she felt slightly dissatisfied with its vagueness.

"I have no wish to stay longer than is necessary. I only wish," he went on, slowly, looking down and drawing figures in the dust with his foot, "that I did not feel that I ought to go at all."

"Why do you go? Tell me, Pablo. Have you ceased to trust me?"

"No, no, 'Cension. I could never cease to trust you, child," a dull red coming guiltily into his cheeks as he remembered that morning. "I will tell you more—everything—when I come

back. So let me help you down now," he said, giving her his hands, touched by her reluctance to see him go. "It is growing chill here, and the night falls so suddenly."

She landed lightly on her feet, and, looking through the trees, said, quickly, "Isn't that Señor Lerma's horse at the door?" Before he could answer she was walking, almost running, towards the house.

The brother looked after her and stood pondering in deep dejection where she had left him before he followed in her footsteps. Evidently the fellow had not found some one else. Well, he would not be gone long, and when he returned he would interview Señor Lerma.

Lerma's *caballo* was indeed at the door, but neither the rider nor 'Cension was to be seen. They had seated themselves on the heap of adobes beyond the

patio. In her joy at seeing her lover's face she had forgotten her misgivings; but now, seated quietly, and Eduardo drinking in the beauty before him, his look stabbed her memory with the old pang.

"Oh, Eduardo," she said, "I have been so unhappy." She paused, embarrassed.

"Unhappy, sweet? Why have you been unhappy?" He took the slender fingers in his two hands and leaned towards her, but she still kept silent. "Can't you tell me what it is, 'Censión?"

"You will hate me!" she burst out, excitedly.

"Hate you, *linda?*" and he said no more, but looked with burning eyes straight into her own.

"Have they told you to give me up?" he asked.

"No, no. No one has told me anything. Why should they? But I—I was at the ball last night — and — I — saw—Jesusita." And she could not have spoken another word to save her life.

"At the ball! Saw Jesusita! Well, what of that? Only you must be dreaming. Who took you to the ball? I did not see you. What do you mean, child?" She sobbed and made no answer.

He soothed her with sweet words, and watched the beautiful abandoned figure with deep perplexity.

"I love Jesusita?" he exclaimed, presently, as she whispered something with her face turned away. "I'd as soon think of loving—that willow post," he retorted, seeking a comparison; and for once in his life he spoke the truth. "I love no creature on earth but your own sweet self." As near as he was capable

of loving anything, he did love the gracious piece of womanhood before him, and at the thought of Jesusita and her platitudes in this hour he could have spat upon the ground in disgust. No, no; if it came to a question of the two, give up this one—never!

Ah, Pablo, watchful brother, you must speed you on your mission, or the inveigler will have made your interference too late!

Later, when he was leaving, 'Cension told him of Pablo's proposed absence. "I could not have planned it better myself," he thought, as he rode along in the beautiful night.

Pablo stood on the long platform of the Mexican Central station next day, waiting for the cars to pull over the bridge before they could go out. Then he went up to Placido, who was tying

his horse behind his outlandish ox-cart.

"Placido, take good care of 'Cension while I am gone. Be—be watchful." Unable to explain his strange request, he walked hurriedly away.

"What ails the boy? 'Take good care of 'Cension!' 'be watchful!' No need to tell me to watch her. Don't I just dote on seeing her shiny eyes and pink cheeks and her kittenish ways. Watch her, indeed!" And the queer old soul mounted his quaint cart behind his quainter steeds, and pounded the patient beasts unmercifully as a vent for the uneasiness his young master's words had inspired.

Pablo Dorantes' journey lasted more days than he had calculated: long days over dusty miles, through arid, ragged foot-hills and bleached valleys at first; then through the lovely valley of Santa

Cruz de Rosales; now into Durango's forbidding sterility; then again amid the grandeur of lofty mountains capped with eternal snow, mazy vistas of bottomless chasms and pyramidal cones and strange cataclysmic confusion of bowlder and gorge and precipice, and on to the summit guarded by lofty La Bufa.

He did not stop here, but went on to the outskirts of Leon, to Maximo Ruperta's. The poor old man had sat half-witted ever since that cruel day when the flood rushed upon them and swept so many souls into eternity and so many homes into nothingness.

Pablo learned much from the sorrowful old man's disjointed lamentations, and followed it up by shrewd and exhaustive questionings of his sad-eyed daughter, who wept alternately over the three little ones lost in the raging waters

and the two forlorn, half-fed ones left to her care. Much saddened by the destitution he saw, Pablo felt his indignation doubly augmented against a certain callous villain whose deceitful smile he knew well. Burning to rush home and unmask him, he bade the deserted wife farewell, leaving a goodly gold coin in the passive palm.

"Say, young sir, if you should happen to see a fine fellow named Lerma in your travels, tell him Silveria Ruperta is dressed in her beautiful white wedding gown, with the orange flowers in her pretty hair, waiting for him and the *padre*," Maximo Ruperta called after the visitor as Pablo hurried away, unable to bear the sound of Silveria Lerma's tearful soothing of the old man, who began shrieking that "the flood was upon them again."

Pablo then went by *diligencia* to San Luis Potosi, still pursued by the hopeless face he saw at Leon, then hastened to the City of Mexico to get confirmation of his last suspicion of Lerma. He succeeded. All was complete! He was ready to return and face the traitor at home. The thought of the coming meeting made his blood boil with wrath. He stopped a half-day at Queretaro on his return, and held a confidential interview with one Guillermo Alderete, who lived under the shadow of the "Cerro de las Campanas," where three lonely crosses mark the spot where Maximilian, Miramon, and Mejia received the death-bullets. As Pablo walked along with his mind full of these fateful reminders, Alderete himself, unwashed, uncombed, after a hard night at "El Antiqua Café del Infiernito," hove in sight and recognized him.

They rushed into each other's arms, smilingly patting each other on the back in that devoted fashion which means so little with the Mexicans. Guillermo was the most famous detective between Zacatecas and the City of Mexico. Pablo explained his mission. Alderete eagerly agreed to accompany him in an hour. Shortly they boarded the train, and sped away on the track of the unsuspecting subject of their whispered conversations.

VII

In the meantime Lerma's knavery was not sleeping. The frequency of his visits in Pablo's absence filled Doña Liseta with deep anxiety, and the restless, worried look on her daughter's face in the last few days touched her heart with vague alarm.

"I do not approve of Señor Lerma's frequent visits," she found courage to say one sunny morning, when mother and daughter were engaged over some needle-work. She noted the blush which suffused 'Cension's face, and she drew discouraging conclusions from it.

"Why should he not come, *mamá?* He loves me, you know, and we will be married when—when"—and her voice

trembled in a frightened way—"when the *padre* thinks best," she concluded, faintly.

"'Cension, Pablo does not approve of Señor Lerma," she made bold to say.

"Not approve? He has not said so to me. He knows we will be married —soon." Again the hesitation and vivid blush that showed more than a girl's natural confusion at the mention of her marriage.

"He ought to have said it," mentally commented the señora. She felt deeply incensed at Pablo's strange treatment of this matter. What could she say or do, indeed, to interfere, when 'Cension had been allowed to believe that the devotion of her lover was almost as acceptable to all the rest as it was to herself. She had no reason to give if she interfered. And certainly Pablo *had* doubted him. Something must be

wrong. He could not mean well. She anxiously reiterated, "I wish Pablo would come."

'Cension rose when her task was finished and walked towards the public road. Seating herself on the trunk of an uprooted cottonwood, she looked absently at the scene before her. The old-time glow which transformed the face at the undisturbed enjoyment of nature did not come to-day.

One accustomed to her sweet vivacity would have been struck by the despondency of the young face, the weariness of the dark eyes, the drooping attitude. Carlyle says, "Say unto all kinds of happiness, I can do without thee; with self-renunciation life begins." It took little indeed to constitute happiness to her; she would make no exhaustive demands upon Fate's hoard of gifts; she asked not for ambition, power, wealth,

or ease, she only craved sunshine and peace. Alas, that such modest petitioners may be turned away empty-handed!

Eduardo rode almost past her before he saw the quiet figure.

"What are you doing, sweetheart?"

"Thinking," she answered, briefly, lifting those dark eyes to his face, to which the long lashes gave the look of those Venetian beauties Giorgione loved to paint.

"Thinking? Then my love has at last decided to—trust, to do *all* that he asks for the man she loves? Is it so?"

He must make the most of this blessed opportunity.

"No, Eduardo. You do not understand. I have decided nothing. The more I think, the more miserable I become." And one wonders how he could feel no pity for the troubled, upturned face.

"You are a cruel, foolish girl." She winced. "I ask you to be married a few weeks sooner than might be expected. You treat me as if I were a *ladron*. I ask you to trust the man you will spend all your future with; you seem to think it a crime. I am out of patience with it all. You don't love me," and he walked off a few steps, well knowing the nature he was dealing with.

"You are unjust," she answered, when he came nearer. "I have given all there is in me of love to you. You well know it. I will not be moved by your reproaches. *Soy la culpable*, for loving you too well. But even for you," she went on, gently, "I cannot consent to do something that would hurt Pablo and *mamá*—and the rest," she added, mentally picturing the bluff father's pride and affection and old Placido's de-

votion, "unless it is best, and for everybody's happiness. You should not ask it. We must not think only of ourselves."

"My happiness counts for *nada*," he exclaimed, impatiently, "and you say you love me!"

"I do," she answered, simply, "I do love you with my whole soul. I have no life only in you," she went on, passionately. "I trust you; I do not doubt you; but—there is something, Eduardo, something within me that tortures me at the thought of doing as you ask. I cannot feel that it is right, though you tell me that it is not wrong. I do not know what it is," she went on in an intense voice. "I cannot make you understand, but I can't be happy for it, and—I cannot go without their consent," she concluded very quietly, with a straight look into his eyes that might well discourage him.

He looked at her sternly, and a disheartening fear came to him that she might not yield at all. But she must; it was almost his last hope. It must be done before that hateful Pablo returned. The amicable feeling between these two was, without doubt, "Brother, brother, we could hang each other."

"'Cension, you make me very unhappy. You make me almost doubt your love. I cannot go without you," and he took her hands and held them close in his own. "I have told you how an unexpected train of circumstances makes it necessary for me to leave here to-morrow, and I ask so little, only that you will go with me—that you will not send me away without you." And the dastard had told it so often, and so much in earnest, that he actually felt for the time that it was true, and a feeling of

almost self-pity came over him vaguely because of these cruel circumstances. "I may never come back. 'Cension," he went on, dramatically, but very much in earnest, for he saw he must do his best, "could you live without me and be happy?" And taking advantage of the pain-stricken expression of her face, he went on, pleadingly, "Do not say no. Then I shall go away, and perhaps never see your face again."

She looked away from him and said never a word. A throbbing went and came within her. She was conscious of only wondering idly why some of the distant cottonwoods were such a brilliant yellow while nearly all else was so sere; it was now November.

Drawing her hands away from his close clasp, she rose wearily to her feet, and said,

"Well—well, let me go now, Ed-

uardo. I feel tired—unsettled. No, do not come to the house with me."

"But when I come to-morrow—will you be ready?" he asked, following her.

"I—I—do not know," she answered, almost as if she did not know what words she was saying.

"I will come, and I will be made happy," he exclaimed. He kissed her hands and stood watching her go slowly back to the house. "She suspects nothing—yet gives me so much trouble. I will have earned my happiness, my pretty one," he said, half aloud, as he turned and walked towards his horse, grazing a few paces away. He had devoted the evening before to Jesusita. As he rode along he thought she would not be so hard to persuade to do what he asked of 'Cension. The clandestine marriage would only add romance, make her feel that she was nobly

sacrificing in her love for him. But, man-like, he longed for the fruit just beyond his reach.

Women are generally accredited with arriving at their conclusions through instinct, not reason; but there was more than a spark of the latter in 'Cension's present indecision. She honestly believed every word the tempter said of the "circumstances" which made him ask of her to be married clandestinely. But why concealment without motive? The guileless nature was tortured at the idea of deceiving those who loved her, and starting on the new life with no blessing.

No! If this marriage must be concealed she would none of it!

The next morning she felt lighter of heart than for many days past, and kissed Doña Liseta with no sign of the shad-

owed eyes that had of late so troubled the mother's heart.

She stood in the door and looked down the road.

"I hope Pablo will come to-day. I will be happier when he is here. I am an ungrateful girl; I have let myself be really unhappy over the thought of this short separation from Eduardo, for it is, of course, nothing more. He will come back soon. Why shouldn't he? But I shall say 'no' to him. It is best so."

She came into the corral with slow-moving Bonito at her heels. Enrique, one of the small brothers, suddenly came in view, shouting, gayly,

"'Cension, here is Pablo!" She followed the flying figure with quick footsteps; she heard a cheery voice greeting Enrique. She fairly flew into Pablo's arms, and held him convulsively about the neck. "Oh, Pablo! oh, Pablo!"

was all she could say in the surprise and relief which came with his helpful presence.

"Little sister, you delight me," he said, smiling at her greeting. "Did you miss me so much, then?"

"I have been unhappy, wretched, without you."

"Where has Lerma been? With you sometimes?"

She looked apprehensively at him. "Yes, quite often." Then she forgot all her reserve. Lerma had told her not to mention this thing to her mother, but had said nothing of the brother.

"Oh, I am *so* glad I did not do it, Pablo!" she said, suddenly, taking his hand. "So glad I did not go before you came. You would not have understood."

"Glad you did not do what?" asked Pablo, his face darkening.

"Don't be angry. Eduardo, poor fellow, has been dreadfully treated by some people he trusted. He has to go away because of it. He is so worried. It is strange how wicked people can be, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," he answered, meaningly. "What is it you are glad you did not do?" he demanded.

She came closer to him with her hands clasped behind her, blushing beautifully, and almost whispered the words which so affected him.

"I am just in time. *Cristo*, if I had been too late!" he said under his breath.

"Pablo, you look as you did when I went to the ball. Are you so angry with me, *hermano? Mamá* said you did not like Eduardo. You do, do you not, Pablo?"

He did not answer. She stood with

downcast eyes and quivering lips before him, like a grieved child at an unexpected reprimand.

After a moment he mastered his passion. He took her by the hand and walked on towards the mother's room, saying, "I am not angry. You are a good little sister to tell me this. I will arrange it with Lerma." She did not see the gleam in his eyes. "Think no more about it now. To-morrow I will tell you why I went away, as I promised to do."

"But I won't be here to-morrow, Pablo *mio*. It is to-night that Eduardo must go."

"Yes, I understand. I know *he* will go away to-night," he said in stern, decisive tones. "But I don't think you will go with him, 'Cension."

"But Father Miranda has promised to be at the church to-night to meet us!

Eduardo told me yesterday. You don't mean that I am not to go? I will be so unhappy to disappoint him," and she gazed pleadingly at him.

"I tell you I will see him when he comes," he answered, evasively. "Run along now; I must have a talk with mother. I have not seen her yet."

He understood, without many words, what his mother had to tell him, and felt that she might well rejoice that he had come, even if she did mingle her satisfaction with much blame for him. He thought it best to keep his sister's late confidence to himself, so he did not tell her all that his coming might mean.

"Heaven be praised that I did not stay that one day more at Queretaro when Alderete urged me," thinking of that gentleman ensconsed in Placido's *jacal* for the night.

He would see Lerma when he came, turn him over to the tender mercies of Alderete's handcuffs, then he would tell 'Cension the whole truth to-morrow. He decided upon his course with no inconsiderable fortitude, for his gentle heart shrank from opening her eyes to the true state of affairs.

The moon rose in a brilliant red-gold disk. It threaded the cottonwoods and fell in sifted rays upon two figures standing very close in the quiet night.

"Pablo says he wants to see you," 'Cension was saying. "I will go and find him."

"No, never mind," interrupted Eduardo, laying his hand upon her arm. "To-morrow will do. I will come to-morrow."

She stood a moment gazing across the field before them, and he thought he

had never before realized how beautiful she was.

"Eduardo, I feel as if I could never be unhappy again." She swung his hand that she held backward and forward as she looked at him half laughing, half earnest. "Here I was making myself almost wretched and wicked, and now everything is so perfect. Pablo has come, and I need not be troubled any more. And now you have come and told me that you do not have to go away to-night! We are very foolish creatures when we let ourselves be miserable when all the world is so beautiful," and she glanced along the moonlit valley.

The sweet, half-sad mood passed, and she looked up at him with merry eyes. "Why are you so silent, Señor?" she demanded, playfully, giving his hand a long swing and dropping it.

Why, indeed?

When 'Cension told him, after the first few words, when he found her there a moment ago, that Pablo had returned, he was bewildered, furious. With her brother in the house he could not propose to her to go to-night. She would naturally insist upon telling him. With shrewdness he had told her at once that he had found that he would not have to leave Paso del Norte just yet, after all, and accepted her loving gesture of glad surprise, while he swore inwardly, undecided as to what he should do next. Then she proposed going to call Pablo. In his confusion he forgot to ask her not to mention this late plan to her brother.

He did not dream that Pablo already knew of the plan for the night, but it would have made no material difference in the events to follow if he had. Pa-

blo was waiting in front to see him, and would have had his reckoning with him even if he had not heard of this last proposed manœuvre.

"You are not going already, are you?" she asked, as he said something of getting his horse.

"I have important things to do to-night."

"Oh, if you might only stay!" she pleaded. "Surely never was so beautiful a night. And look at the Indians' signal-fires, Eduardo, along the mountains."

"They are great idiots to lug wood up there to amuse the people in the valley with these illuminations," said Lerma, sourly.

"Eduardo, don't say so. It is all in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. What, you must go? Well, *adios*."

He did not care to see Pablo just yet.

He must get away, think it out. She left a kiss on the hand that held hers as he turned and hurried off.

Left alone, 'Cension stood a moment watching the twinkling signal-fires. Then she turned towards the house. Doña Liseta stood in the *patio* critically eying the paper coverings she had just adjusted over some plants, thinking the mild November night might prove colder than usual.

"They will be safe, won't they, 'Cension?" she asked, as her daughter came towards her in the moonlight.

"You dear, careful mother, yes," she answered, lightly swinging by the *madre's* waist as she passed her.

"Where are you going, child?"

"Only for a little walk," she answered, looking back.

'Cension had thought of something she wished to say to Lerma. His visit

had been so unsatisfactory. He might not yet have passed the hedge; she hurried through the alfalfa; she neared the road. She heard Pablo's voice in conversation with some one. "So they met, after all," she thought, with a smile, slackening her pace and nearing the two unseen talkers. She would not interrupt them. She was thinking how the bare limbs of a tree in front looked like supplicating arms held aloft towards the sky. Then her attention was attracted by Pablo's voice, raised, as he said,

"I'll have no more parleying, you dog! *You* can't marry any woman, much less my sister."

Lerma's voice sounded in an insolent laugh as he retorted, "I did not expect to trouble myself about the marrying part. Padre Miranda agreed to do the job for *quince pesos*, just to satisfy the little one. I wanted herself."

Pablo's eyes burned dangerously. He seemed hardly able to restrain himself. Then he cried, indignantly,

"I have seen your wife and little children, villain!"

"The devil you have!" exclaimed the other, unguardedly.

Neither man saw the figure a few steps away that, with tightly clasped hands and startled, piteous eyes, stood stricken with its first knowledge of *incontinencia.*

"Not only that! I know by the help of whose deft fingers those German jewels disappeared from the post-office!"

Pablo was too intent to notice the wicked light of the eyes that scintillated in the moonlight as Lerma stood like an animal ready to spring. "I know who is wanted, not by the name of Lerma, but Garcia, at the city, for

the conspiracy against—" But he never finished the sentence.

The girlish figure rushed forward! Pablo had his sister in his arms. 'Cension's own body had sheathed the deadly stiletto aimed at her brother.

Lerma leaped down the road. The sound of his horse's fleeing hoofs came on the still night.

Pablo knelt on the ground, still holding his nerveless burden. His face looked more death-stricken than that on his breast. With a shuddering sob he murmured, "Oh, my little sister, it is the kinder of the two he has given you." Bonito raised his head in the *patio* and sent out a dismal howl. It was answered down the lane by Alderete's curses. He mounted and struck his spurs into his horse's flanks.

"Come back!" cried Pablo, frantically. "Nothing matters now! He

has killed her. Oh, 'Cension! 'Cension!"

"God help us, surely not!" said Alderete, coming up. "There, brace up, my boy," he went on, kindly, loosening the figure from Pablo's clasp. "Look, it would have been your heart, but it is only her arm! She has fainted."

Even as he spoke there was a tremble on the white face, and two pathetic dark eyes flashed their love and resignation into Pablo's anxious ones.

Next morning when Conchita Barassa called her sister Jesusita there was no answer. The unscrupulous *padre* had received his shamefully earned dollars the night before, not knowing or caring that the bride had been asked ten minutes before on the plea that the post-office authorities were on the bridegroom's track.

"PABLO KNELT ON THE GROUND, STILL HOLDING HIS NERVELESS BURDEN"

Alas, it is only the same old story!

" The tale repeated o'er and o'er,
With change of place and change of name,
Disguised, transformed, and yet the same
We've heard a hundred times before."

THE END

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